

Where Did the Hintermeister Family Originate? by Hans Kläui, Oberwinterthur, Switzerland¹

Translated by Edward Hintermeister

Since the second half of the 15th century, the Hintermeister Family can be encountered on the Bänikon farm in the community of Kloten, at that time still belonging to the parish of Embrach. It is here where the family out-grew the capacity of the farm and several children moved to other communities. In 1530 Konrad Hintermeister lived in Kloten, and in 1540 the brothers Hans and Heini Hintermeister were living on the inherited tenet farm², which was held by their father, Ueli, of the All Saints (Allerheiligen) Monastery at Rieden. In 1554 Heinrich Hintermeister, a leather tanner from Rieden, became a citizen (German word Burger)³ of Zurich. Likewise, Felix became a citizen in 1556 and also a member of the Clergyman (Prediger) Monastery Chorus in Zurich. In the 17th century, two lines of the Bänikon Family moved to the Parish of Elsau; Konrad Hintermeister-Huber moved to Fulau, a nearby village, and Josias moved to the village of Elsau. Two of Konrad's sons later lived in Unter-Schnasberg. In this way the Hintermeister name became typical of the Elsau area.

Still before 1800 representatives of the family can also be found in Dietlikon, Neftenbach, Niederhasli, and Würenlos (Canton of Aargau). In the 19th century Hintermeisters had become citizens of Bülach, Elgg, Illnau, Küssnacht, Lindau, and Winterthur, moving from Elsau.

The Historical Biographical Dictionary of Switzerland states that the first Hintermeister residence was a farm called Grafsbühl near Embrach in the year 1370. This statement, however, seems somewhat doubtful, because the family was definitely in Geerlisberg (Municipality of Kloten) about 60 years later. There was a farm called Grafsbühl in the hills east of the village of Embrach, which later in the middle ages went to ruin. Also the property book of the Embrach Monastery mentions this, plus on the Gygerschen Canton map of 1667, there is a "Grafenspuel" with a castle ruins. While Graf means "Earl" in English, it is difficult to say if this settlement was named for the "Earl of Embrach and Wulflingen", or if the family name was Graf. There is a mention of Hintermeisters in 1370 written in Latin in a Residence book of the Embrach Monastery. A checking of this book shows that the believed settlement of Hintermeisters was misinterpreted. In the Middle Ages numerous groups of vowels were used in Latin with certain abbreviations, and these abbreviations were also used in the German language for town names. So the solution to this text reveals that the word is not Grafsbühl but Gerlasperg, consequently Geerlisberg! The questionable passage says:

"Item Cuonrat Hindermeister de Gerlasperg et frater suus Ruodolfus et sorores et pueri."

("Also Konrad Hintermeister from Geerlisberg and his brother Rudolf and the sisters and the

¹ "Woher stammt das Geschlecht Hintermeister", translated by Edward A. Hintermeister (Muscatine, Iowa), from the Swiss newspaper Wochenblatt von Pfäffikon, September 8, 1951, edition.

² During the Middle Ages the church would own the farms, but a family line could reside on their tenet farm as long as they had sons to inherit it. Also, once a family was living on a farm, the church could not reclaim it.

³ A Burger during the Middle Ages was a man, who was allowed to live within the protection of the city walls, and only respected people could be Burgers.

children.")

With that it has been established that the first homestead of the Hintermeisters was Geerlisberg. An income record from the Embrach Monastery states that in the year 1429 (translation): "Also Hintermeister gives from the farm in Geerlisberg three-fourths hundred-weight of grains." On 4 December 1438, it says a Ruedi Hintermeister from Geerlisberg was a witness in a trial of the brothers Ueli and Grossruedi Velthen (Veltheim) from Marchlen against the Embrach Monastery. In the tax books of Geerlisberg from the years 1463/69 the names Isler and Eberhart are written where Hintermeister earlier had appeared, and there were no more Hintermeisters listed. But, at this time the brothers Heini and Ueli Hintermeister, along with their households were living on the farm Bänikon. From these men came numerous descendents, as previously mentioned. What made the Hintermeisters leave Geerlisberg and move to the still more remote Bänikon? It can only be assumed that Geerlisberg and other Embracher farms were burned by the Swiss Confederation troupes during the Old Zürich War (1444).

There is still the question if the family established in Geerlisberg in 1370 can still be traced farther back. A Revocation record from the domain of Austria, which is about people who were alienated from their legal masters, may be a help. It mentioned that in about the year 1300, a sister of a rope maker (German word "Seiler") in Geerlisberg (soro dicti Seiler in Gerlosperg), was a bond maid of the Church of Embrach and illegally owned by the Lord of Wagenberg. The same record also mentioned another ropemaker "Seiler" who lived in Wagenberg, probably on the farm belonging to the Castle Wagenberg (today Unter-Wagenburg). Is there possibly any connection between the rope maker of Geerlisberg of about 1300 and Konrad and Rudolf Hintermeister mentioned in 1370? A hint, even if not absolutely conclusive, is the fact that both the rope maker and the Hintermeisters were serfs of the Monastery Embrach.

A step farther toward the solution leads us to the "Coat of Arms" of the Zürich line of Hintermeisters. This "Coat of Arms" has been well preserved and can be seen in The Book of Heraldry" written by Dietrich Meyer in 1605. This same crest may also be seen in the "Family Book" by Fries and Wüst, however, this coat of arms can only be associated with the family who were citizens of Zürich in the 16th century. The shield is somewhat complex, and shows a silver trademark, accompanied by two silver colored handles, which have gold colored knobs. These symbols are accompanied by three golden stars, all of which is over three green mountain peaks on a red background. How is it that the handles are shown on the "Hintermeister Coat of Arms"? The choice of this tool, which served to weave ropes, must have resulted from the rope maker profession, which was practiced by earlier Hintermeisters. Therefore, this coat of arms establishes a relationship between the rope maker of 1300 and the Hintermeisters of 1370, both of whom lived in Geerlisberg. Since the country folk at the time of the rope maker (Seiler) did not yet have consolidated family names, it is not sure here, if "Seiler" means the profession or the family name. It probably means both, since the man who was called "Rope maker" also practiced that trade!

If 70 years later the family name changed to Hintermeister, it would not have been extraordinary. Probably the name Hintermeister also referred to the occupation. It is well known that tradesmen were called "Master" (German word "Meister") and addressed as such. They probably called one of the rope makers of Geerlisberg Hintermeister to distinguish him from a colleague or a near relative. Maybe he lived at the end of the village. In these hilly regions the prefixes "Hinter" (behind) and

"Vorder" (front) were used to determine location, as is shown in the family names Hinter and Vordermarchlen and later Hinter and Vorderbänikon.

If this hypothesis is correct, the coat of arms has made it possible to trace the family of the Zürich region back to the time of the foundation of the Swiss Confederation and to determine their earliest residence. It would still be good to add a remark concerning the use of this Coat of Arms. The Hintermeisters who lived in the town of Zürich, and to whom the shield belonged, later died out, and the present-day Hintermeisters living in Zürich originally came from surrounding communities, According to the rules concerning the use of the Coat of Arms, as they are observed in the Swiss Cantons today, it is not possible for the country dwelling families to claim the Coat of Arms that was adapted for the Zürich family of Hintermeisters. Likewise, the Coat of Arms of a family, which has died out, may not be claimed by other Hintermeisters without some modifications. These two barriers apply to the Hintermeisters of today, but since they are undoubtedly related to the late Zürich line; they are, according to the mentioned principles, allowed to use a similar Coat of Arms. That is, they must make a clearly recognizable change on the handed down Coat of Arms. It is recommended to leave out the handles, as this would simplify the already overcrowded Coat of Arms, and also because these emblems no longer pertain to the Hintermeisters' professions of today. These facts must be pointed out, because the old Coat of Arms of the Hintermeisters may be seen in the "Book of Heraldry of Zürich" written by Jean Eglis and also in the "Book of Heraldry of Winterthur" printed in 1855. In the last-named book the Coat of Arms only shows two instead of three golden stars, but this change is not sufficient.

Since during the Middle ages only respected people could be witnesses, it can be seen that the rope maker trade was important, because H. (Heinrich?) called Rope maker was a witness in Winterthur in the year 1249 (Zürich Records Book II, 234). It will probably be impossible to determine if he was related to the rope maker of Geerlisberg, or if he was a citizen of Winterthur, not related to the Geerlisberg, family.

The following information was not included in Hans Kläui's original article, but is provided as an augmentation:

Heraldic Description

Hintermeister

Arms (Shield):

Shield basically red with inverted silver "Y", located in the upper two-thirds of shield. The inverted "Y" has a hook bent to the right, and at either end of the legs, a small upward bend. Placed on both sides of the inverted "Y" are two items of silver shaped as bayonets going through a small golden ball. Everything is accompanied by a small green hill with three rounded tops, located at bottom of shield.

Crest:

Two arms, with silver armor and red elbows and arm protection sleeves, and silver hands.

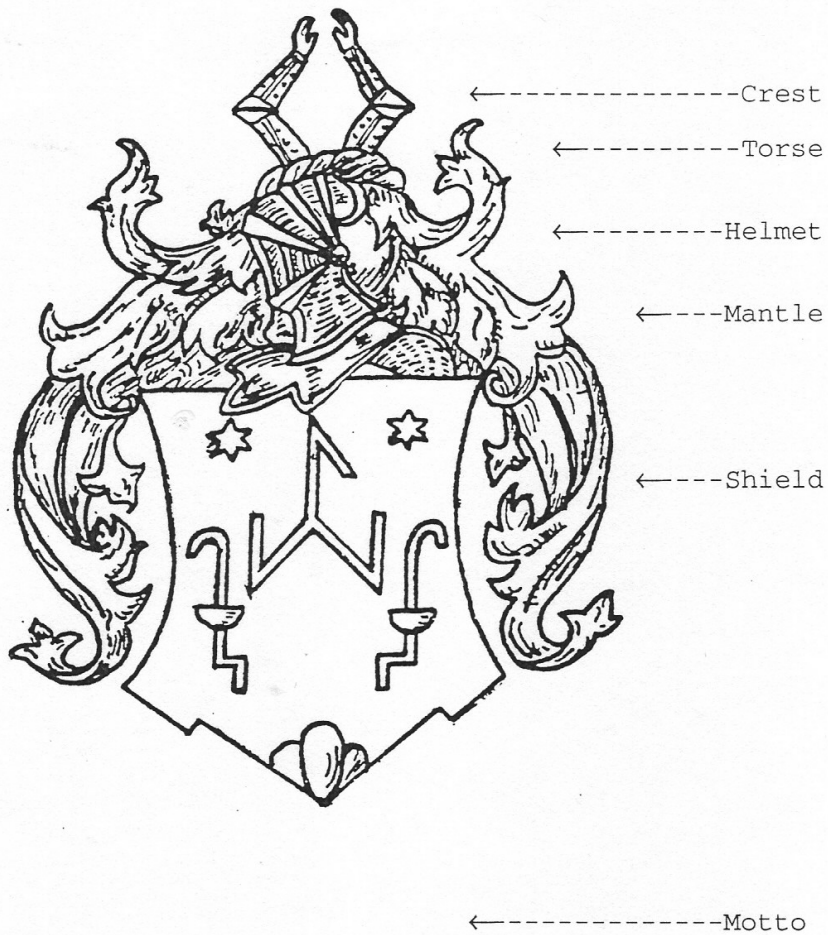
Motto: None recorded.

Variant: ----

Reference Source:

Armorial General, Volume 1, Plate 956

HINTERMEISTER COAT OF ARMS



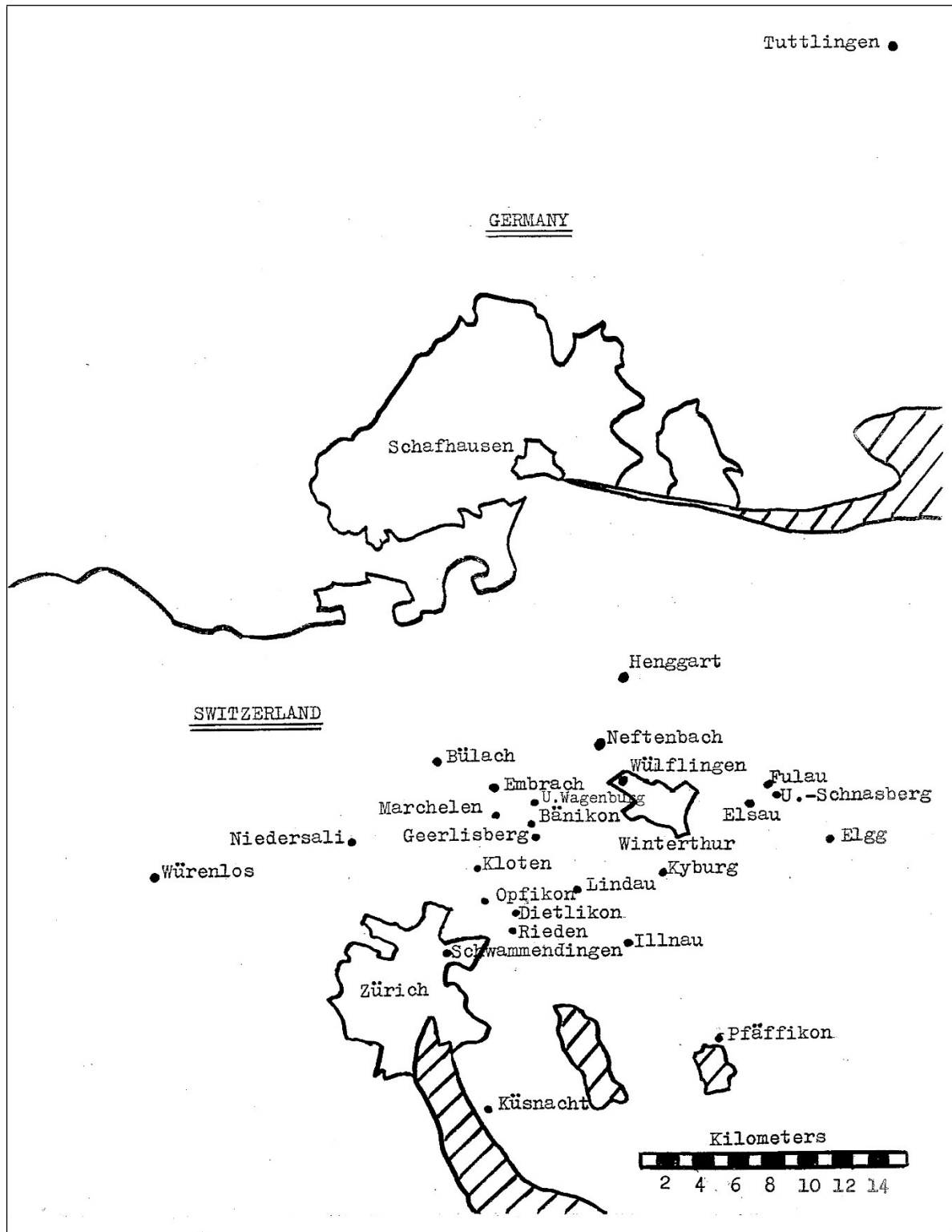


Figure 1. Locator Map for Towns and Villages Mentioned in Hans Kläui Article